

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 39, Vivek Hallegere Murthy, of Florida, to be Medical Director in the Regular Corps of the Public Health Service, subject to qualifications therefor as provided by law and regulations, and to be Surgeon General of the Public Health Service for a term of four years.

Charles E. Schumer, Patrick J. Leahy, Richard J. Durbin, Christopher A. Coons, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jon Tester, Richard Blumenthal, Michael F. Bennet, Sheldon Whitehouse, Sherrod Brown, Jeanne Shaheen, Debbie Stabenow, Thomas R. Carper, Margaret Wood Hassan, Elizabeth Warren, Patty Murray, Alex Padilla, Tina Smith, Tim Kaine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Vivek Hallegere Murthy, of Florida, to be Medical Director in the Regular Corps of the Public Health Service, subject to qualifications therefor as provided by law and regulations, and to be Surgeon General of the Public Health Service for a term of four years, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 57, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 130 Ex.]

YEAS—57

Baldwin	Hickenlooper	Portman
Bennet	Hirono	Reed
Blumenthal	Kaine	Romney
Booker	Kelly	Rosen
Brown	King	Sanders
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Schatz
Cardin	Leahy	Schumer
Carper	Lujan	Shaheen
Casey	Manchin	Sinema
Cassidy	Markey	Smith
Collins	Marshall	Stabenow
Coons	Menendez	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Tester
Duckworth	Murkowski	Van Hollen
Durbin	Murphy	Warner
Feinstein	Murray	Warnock
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Warren
Hassan	Padilla	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Peters	Wyden

NAYS—43

Barrasso	Graham	Risch
Blackburn	Grassley	Rounds
Blunt	Hagerty	Rubio
Boozman	Hawley	Sasse
Braun	Hoeven	Scott (FL)
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Scott (SC)
Capito	Inhofe	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Thune
Cotton	Kennedy	Tillis
Cramer	Lankford	Toomey
Crapo	Lee	Tuberville
Cruz	Lummis	Wicker
Daines	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Paul	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 57, the nays are 43.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Vivek Hallegere Murthy, of Florida, to be Medical Director in the Regular Corps of the Public Health Service, subject to qualifications therefor as provided by law and regulations, and to be Surgeon General of the Public Health Service for a term of four years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that with respect to the Young nomination, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, today I am proud to join a number of my colleagues to highlight the importance of S. 1, the For the People Act.

The ballot box is the pulsating heart of our government of, by, and for the people.

President Lyndon B. Johnson said:

The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice.

Think about that—"the most powerful instrument ever devised for breaking down injustice."

It is Robert Kennedy who observed that "each citizen's right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship."

You know, the opportunity to cast a ballot is not just an opportunity. It is not simply a responsibility. But it is a right—the right—the right that embodies all it means to a republic in which the power flows from the people.

Our Nation, however imperfect in the beginning, has worked toward this vision of citizens through the ballot box, driving the vision of our Nation, for over 200 years, overcoming barrier after barrier. We overcame some of the barriers of race with the 14th and 15th Amendments. We overcame the barriers of gender with the 19th Amendment. We overcame barriers that had denied Native Americans the right to vote with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. We overcame the barriers of Jim Crow with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But now, as we stand in this Chamber, the central right of each citizen's opportunity to participate in the election through the ballot box is again under attack.

Right now as we speak, there are 253 bills in 43 States assaulting the right to vote. These efforts are designed to make it harder for students to vote, for low-income Americans to vote, for Native Americans to vote, for seniors to vote, and most insidiously, for Black and Brown Americans to vote. And I say "most insidiously" because blocking access to the ballot has been a mas-

sive form of systemic racism throughout our history for Black Americans.

But all of us in this Chamber have taken an oath to the Constitution. All of us have a responsibility to defend the ballot box. It is our responsibility to knock down the barriers that others would put up to prevent citizens from having the opportunity to participate in our elections. That is exactly what S. 1, For the People, does in the face of the greatest attack on voting rights in this Nation since Jim Crow.

This legislation puts the power back where it belongs—in the hands of the people.

This bill said that if you believe in the vision of our democratic Republic, then you believe in voter empowerment, not voter intimidation, not voter obstruction, not voter suppression.

This bill says that the people should choose their politicians, not the other way around. Gerrymandering attacks the very notion of equal representation that is so important in the social contract of the citizens with their government. So this bill says we will have an independent commission in each State to draw the boundaries of the districts so that we put an end to partisan gerrymandering.

This bill says that government of, by, and for the people means you can't have a stadium sound system turned up to full volume, drowning out the voice of the people. And what is that stadium sound system? It is the dark money, hundreds of millions of dollars of unidentified funds racing and coursing through our elections across this country, doing attack ads, with citizens having no idea where that funding is coming from. That is simply wrong.

This bill says that public servants should work in the public interest, not to line their own pockets, not to serve simply the wealthy or the powerful or the privileged.

These points are straightforward. We have been fighting to improve and guarantee the vision of government of, by, and for the people over our entire history. Now, to protect our system of voting, the foundation of our Republic, we have to get this bill over the finish line. We have an extraordinary team working to make that happen, Senators with sturdy, clear ideals and excellent ideas and grit and determination coming together to save our Republic: Senator KLOBUCHAR, who will be speaking next—author of several of the key provisions of this bill, including bipartisan provisions—who tomorrow will be chairing the first-ever Senate hearing on this landmark legislation; Senator PADILLA, who knows exactly what it is like to be a secretary of state and has been an amazing champion for voter empowerment in his home State; Senator VAN HOLLEN, who led the EMPOWER Act and the Restoring Integrity to America's Elections Act; Senator WHITEHOUSE, who authored the DISCLOSE Act portion of the bill and is a tremendous leader on campaign finance reform.

Today, our Nation is at a crossroads. Are we going to be a nation for “we the people,” or are we going to be a nation for “we the powerful”?

We must pass the For the People Act to save our democracy. As our leader said last week, “Failure is not an option.” So let’s get it done, and let’s ensure, as Abraham Lincoln declared, that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

I yield to Senator KLOBUCHAR.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I come to the floor today to join my colleague, Senator MERKLEY, and so many others in speaking in support of the critical democracy reforms in the For the People Act—legislation that I am honored to lead with Senator MERKLEY and Majority Leader SCHUMER, Representative SARBANES, in the House, which passed this bill very recently through their entire Chamber.

This bill will, in short, make it easier to vote, not harder to vote, as, sadly, some of our colleagues have proposed over the years. But it will make it easier to vote, end the dominance of big money in politics and ensure that public officials work for the public interest. And it includes provisions, as Senator MERKLEY noted, from 15 bills that I lead to strengthen our democracy.

I appreciate my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have contributed to the ideas in this bill. It represents the combined work of so many people in this Chamber who are dedicated to improving our democracy.

Nine bipartisan bills are part of the For the People Act—bills like the Honest Ads Act, which I originally introduced with Senator McCain, of the great State of Arizona, the Presiding Officer’s home State, and now lead with Senator GRAHAM and Senator WARNER.

What does that bill do? Well, it improves disclosure requirements for online ads, disclosure requirements that aren’t in law. It is not right. And that is why this is just one of the many provisions with bipartisan support, the election security reforms that so many of us worked on, including Senator LANKFORD and Senator BURR. Those are in this bill.

These are reforms that have broad support among the American people. According to a Pew Research Center poll, 65 percent of respondents said the option to vote early, in this bill, or absentee, in this bill, should be available to any voter. And a poll from the Campaign Legal Center found that 83 percent of likely voters support public disclosure of contributions to organizations involved in elections. Of course, they do. People want to know who is paying for these ads they see on TV. They want to know where the money is from, and then they can follow the money.

Many of the provisions in the bill have already been adopted across the

country in red, blue, and purple States. And Republican and Democratic election officials and Governors have supported them.

As the chair of the Senate Rules Committee, the committee with jurisdiction over Federal elections and campaign finance law and the committee to which this bill has been referred, I believe we must get this done. Tomorrow, as noted by Senator MERKLEY, we will be holding a hearing on the bill. I am pleased that every single Democratic Member of this committee is a cosponsor of the bill. I intend to move quickly to a markup to send the bill to the Senate floor for a vote.

The For the People Act is critically important. It is important because it would improve our democracy by protecting voting rights, getting dark money out of our elections, and putting in place anti-corruption reforms. It is important because every one of the things that we want to get done, from rebuilding our economy to fixing our immigration system, to investing in infrastructure, to tackling the climate crisis, to reforming our criminal justice system, they all depend on a democracy that works for the people.

Last November, in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic, nearly 160 million Americans voted, more people than ever before in the history of America. Think about that—in the middle of a pandemic. And we know we saw the pictures on TV. We saw the people at the very beginning before we knew what safety protocols should be in place, when things were getting messed around—those people in Wisconsin in garbage bags, in garbage bags in the rain, standing in line to vote.

Why did so many people vote in the middle of a pandemic, both sides of the aisle—Democrats, Republicans, Independents—why did they vote? Well, they were interested in the election; we know that. But it was more than that. In part, they voted because they had more access to voting because of the changes that were made in the States. Vote-by-mail was available and easier for so many more people to do than ever before.

We think about those people who suddenly had new means to vote in States where they suddenly didn’t have to get a notary public or two signatures or this or that just to exercise their right to vote. They voted, and they voted in droves.

Even though the overwhelming majority of Americans have made it clear they want to see policies that continue to make it easier to vote, sadly, there are those on the other side of the aisle who have been doubling down to find ways to make it harder to vote. As Senator MERKLEY noted, over 250 bills were introduced in States across the country, including my home State of Minnesota, that had the highest voter turnout once again in the country. People are trying to make it harder to vote, including in Arizona where they had such a record turnout, including in

Georgia. Why? As Senator WARNOCK said so beautifully and succinctly in his maiden Senate floor speech just last week: “Some people don’t want some people to vote.” Well, that is not how this country was founded. That is not what our Constitution says.

We cannot just sit back and let our democracy be undermined. As I said from the inaugural stage on that beautiful blue-sky day at the very place where you could still see the spray paint at the bottom of the columns and makeshift windows that we had in place after the January 6 attack:

This is the day our democracy picks itself up, brushes off the dust, and does what America always does: goes forward as a nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

For decades, there have been those who have been trying to chip away at the fundamental right to vote. We can’t just keep taking it. We have to ensure that right to vote.

What is this about? One, making it easier to vote. That is exactly what For the People does. It includes provisions that I have championed and so many others have, like automatic voting registration, ending purges of voting rolls, ending redistricting commissions, requiring all States to allow same-day voting registration, and voting by mail.

These are commonsense policies that were already in place in many States in the 2020 general election. Forty-five States didn’t require an excuse to vote by mail. This will ensure that in every State, you don’t need to make an excuse. Twenty-one States have same-day registration, including States like Idaho, Wyoming, and Iowa. Forty-three States have early voting. Just last month, Kentucky’s Republican secretary of state praised a State bill that would make early in-person voting permanent.

Certainly, we need to ban purges of voting rolls. As my friend Stacey Abrams said: If you don’t go to a meeting every year, you don’t lose your right to assemble under the Constitution. If you don’t go to church or synagogue or mosque or temple, you don’t lose your right to worship. So if you haven’t voted for a few elections and you decide you want to vote because you care about a candidate or an issue, you should not lose your right to vote. But in too many places, that is not the case.

Twenty States already have automatic voter registration laws, including West Virginia, Alaska, and Georgia. This bill simply says they all should.

The second major reform we need is to get the big money out of politics. The For the People Act helps bring transparency to campaign spending so that voters are informed about who is funding candidates and who is paying for the ads.

It also tightens regulations on super PACs and restructures the Federal Election Commission to make it more

effective and less prone to partisan gridlock.

The third major reform in the For the People Act is restoring trust in our government. Democracy isn't just about what happens on election day; it is also about making sure that our elected officials are accountable once they take office.

The For the People Act ensures that Members of Congress and other Federal officials are truly working for the people. It expands conflict of interest laws, prohibits Members of Congress from serving on the boards of for-profit entities, and codifies ethics rules for the executive branch.

Most importantly, why does the highest Court in the land not have any ethic rules for the Supreme Court when every other Federal court in the Nation does? This bill answers that question.

Three simple ideas: Making voting easier, getting big money out of politics, and strengthening ethics rules.

The year 2020 marked the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, and a century after that ratification, we elected our first African American, first Asian American, and first woman Vice President in Vice President KAMALA HARRIS. As we celebrate these firsts, we are reminded that throughout our country's history, the right to vote has been hard-fought and hard-won.

As Congressman John Lewis, whom we sadly lost, once said:

Your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union.

When we reflect on the sacrifices and strides that have been made for the right to vote, one thing is very clear: The fight isn't over. The best way we can honor the countless Americans who have risked and, in some cases, given their lives—given their lives to protect our freedoms overseas, given their lives to protect our democracy here at home—the best way is to make sure that democracy continues unfettered and that everyone has the right to vote because we know, as Senator WARNOCK reminded us, that there are some people who are trying to make it hard for some people to vote. That is not how America works.

The For the People Act is all about making sure democracy works for everyone.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I see we are joined by two Senators who are going to be speaking, Senator PADILLA—three Senators—from California, as well as Senator WHITEHOUSE from Rhode Island and Senator VAN HOLLEN from Maryland.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. PADILLA. Madam President, I rise to speak today on the For the People Act.

But before I do, I want to take a moment to honor the lives of those trag-

ically lost in Colorado yesterday by yet another senseless mass shooting in our country. My heart breaks for their families, but the sobering and harsh reality is that in many parts of the United States, it is easier to buy a gun than it is to cast a ballot. In 25 States, voters must be registered and have specific forms of identification in order to cast a ballot, but those same States allow people to buy rifles without permits and require no bond checks for some sales. Think about that. It seems to me that we have our priorities entirely backward when it comes to making it easier to buy a weapon than we do to cast a ballot.

As we work to rebuild our economy for all people, we must acknowledge that to build an inclusive economy, we need an inclusive democracy. Just as the pandemic has put a spotlight on the inequities in our economy and our healthcare systems, so, too, has the pandemic put a spotlight on the inequities in access to the ballot. The 2020 election, held in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated once again that we have made it easier for some citizens to vote than others. This is not an accident.

Depending on where a voter lives, they may or may not have the ability to register to vote online; they may or may not be able to participate in same-day registration; they may or may not be able to vote early or vote by mail. All this varies State by State. This patchwork has a direct and dramatic effect on whose voices are heard in our democracy, and, too often, it is working-class communities, communities of color, young people whose voices are silenced.

For voters whose work schedule does not allow them to wait in line to vote, the denial of vote-by-mail or early voting denies the opportunity to vote altogether.

For voters who do not have that specified form of State identification, even though they are American citizens of voting age and otherwise eligible to vote, lack of an ID can mean that they will not be given a ballot, even if they can verify their identity some other way.

For voters who want to vote by mail and may have access to some form of vote-by-mail, unreasonable ballot receipt deadlines, a scarcity of ballot return locations, and/or slow or unreliable Postal Service delivery can mean that their ballots won't be counted.

For young voters and for those who move frequently, antiquated registration systems and unreasonably early registration deadlines can leave them unable to register to vote or to update their registration record in time to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

All of these voting restrictions have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Just like the poll taxes and literacy tests of the Jim Crow era, the truth is plain for all to see: Voter suppression laws are rooted in White supremacy.

The For the People Act presents an opportunity for us to establish a baseline of voting rights and ballot access for all voters. I know that the For the People Act will improve voting rights in America because, as California's secretary of state, I helped adopt and implement these best practices. These include automatic and same-day voter registration; online voter registration; expanded access to vote-by-mail; extended early voting periods—in-person early voting periods; and widespread, convenient access to secure, official ballot drop-off locations. Together, these policies help to ensure equitable access to the ballot and, in so doing, strengthen our democracy.

While California has led the way in making our elections more accessible to all voters, the policies we have implemented are not unique to our State. States like Maine and Alaska have also adopted automatic voter registration policies. States like Utah, Iowa, Idaho, and Wyoming also permit same-day voter registration. States like Florida and Ohio allow no-excuse vote-by-mail and provide voters with early voting options as well.

The election reforms within the For the People Act are not partisan. These reforms are not Democrat or Republican. They are common sense and are proven to work. All voters deserve equal voting rights and equal access to the ballot.

Colleagues, we are a stronger democracy and a better nation when we hear all voices from all corners of our Nation and when those voices are not just heard but counted. By passing the For the People Act, we can ensure that more voices are heard and more voices are, indeed, counted.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, first, I thank my colleagues who have gathered here on the floor to help pass and urge the passage of this very important piece of legislation, the For the People Act.

Our Constitution begins with three words that ring in the minds of each and every American, "We the People."

Seventy-six years after those words were written, President Lincoln resolved, in 1863, that those who had lost their lives on the battlefield at Gettysburg "shall not have died in vain and that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the Earth."

One hundred two years after Gettysburg, our beloved former colleague, Congressman John Lewis—then a civil rights activist and leader—together with nonviolent marchers, was beaten bloody by Alabama State Troopers in 1965 as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge while demanding voting rights. Later that year in 1965, Congress acted and did pass the Voting Rights Act, and it was reauthorized regularly thereafter, most recently in 2006 by a vote of 90 to 0 here in the U.S. Senate

and 390 to 33 in the House, where I served at that time.

Then, in 2013, in the case of *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court, in a notorious 5-to-4 decision, stripped away a key enforcement provision from the Voting Rights Act: the requirement that the Department of Justice approve changes to voting rights laws in States that had histories of discriminating against African-American voters and others in their past laws.

Almost immediately, like within 24 hours, you saw States that had been covered by that act begin to move to erect barriers to the ballot box, making it more difficult for people of color to vote. Indeed, in the case of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP v. McCrory, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit said that the voting provisions passed by the North Carolina legislature, in the aftermath of the rollback of the Voting Rights Act, were designed to “target African-Americans with almost surgical precision.”

Now we come to 2021. On January 6, we witnessed a violent mob, incited by the former President of the United States, attack this Capitol in order to overturn the results of a democratic election. The mob came because of the big lie—the big lie told by Donald Trump and fueled by some of his allies here on Capitol Hill—that he had been cheated out of an election victory. It is a pernicious and insidious lie that has caused Republican State legislatures across the country to try to build up barriers to voting: limiting vote-by-mail, reducing the number of days for early voting, even making it illegal in Georgia for anyone to provide water to someone who is waiting in line to vote—a real provision that has already passed the Georgia House and that is on its way to the Senate. These are all measures designed to make it harder for American citizens to exercise their right to vote.

We needed the For the People Act before January 6, but we need it more than ever now to establish some minimum national standards to ensure that every American's right to vote is secure.

In addition to the barriers being erected around the country to voting, our democracy faces another real and present danger: the flood of cash from Big Money and special interests—invading the airwaves and invading the internet—that seeks to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.

In 2010, in another notorious 5-to-4 Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United*, the Court opened the floodgates to unlimited amounts of corporate special interest money flowing into our elections. Over \$14 billion was spent in the 2020 election cycle, much of it secret. In fact, one of the consequences of that decision, coupled with already existing laws, was that more money flowed secretly into our elections—the dark money, the dark money trying to hijack our democracy for the highest bidder.

As my colleagues have said, the American people have a right to know who is spending all of this money to try to influence their votes. That is why, back in 2010, I authored and the House passed the DISCLOSE Act—to require that the information be available to voters and the American people. In fact, had that House bill become law, we wouldn't have secret money today. While it was overwhelmingly popular in the country and supported by an overwhelming majority of Senators at the time, because of fate and a quirk of history in the death of Ted Kennedy, the Senate was not able to secure the 60 votes necessary to overcome a filibuster. Ted Kennedy passed away, and his replacement was a Republican. This Senate voted with 59 votes—a big majority—to pass the DISCLOSE Act, but because of the filibuster rule, it couldn't get over that hurdle.

The DISCLOSE Act is part of S. 1. Senator WHITEHOUSE and all of the Senators here have been part of that effort. It is part of S. 1.

We cannot afford to repeat the history of 2010. We cannot allow a minority of Senators who represent a minority of the public in this country and the people of this country to stop the For the People Act. We have a duty to every patriotic American who has worked hard—and the many who have spilled blood—for the right to vote. We have a duty to pass the For the People Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

MR. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I pick up where Senator VAN HOLLEN left off because, when he was fighting for the DISCLOSE Act in the House, I was the manager of that bill on the floor here in the Senate.

It would do something very simple. If you are spending more than \$10,000 in an election, we ought to know who you are. That is pretty easy. It is not going to rope in lots of small donors. It will get the big interests who are out there trying to control our democracy and hide who they are while they are doing it.

As Senator VAN HOLLEN said, this started with *Citizens United*—a wretched decision that unleashed unlimited money into our politics, but it said that the unlimited money was going to be transparent. That was its predicate: It is going to be transparent. You won't have corruption because everybody will be able to see. The ad will say: We are ExxonMobil, and we paid for this message.

Well, of course, the dark money forces, in having achieved that victory at the Supreme Court, went right out and violated that predicate—right out. They have built an entire architecture of deception around their campaign finances since then. It is the 501(c) corporations that don't have to report their donors. It is the donor-advised trusts that are money identity laun-

dering devices for big donors. It is even as simple as phoney-baloney shell corporations. Sometimes they are stacked up, and the money goes to the phoney-baloney shell corporation. The shell corporation launders it through DonorsTrust, and DonorsTrust gives it to the 501(c), and it dumps it into the super PAC. They all know it is going on. This is orchestrated stuff.

So we have a real battle on our hands. We passed the billion-dollar-in-dark-money threshold a long time ago. When people are spending \$1 billion in dark money to influence what goes on in this country, you can bet they are winning. You can bet they are winning. They wouldn't keep spending money by the billions if they were not winning. So we have to put a stop to this.

The American people are with us. The polling is unbelievable. It is in the nineties. Whether you are a Bernie Bro or a tea partier, you hate the idea that there is big dark money in politics calling the tune for Congress to dance to, but that is the fact. Look at the outcomes.

Look at climate change. There is no dispute about the science. We all know what needs to be done, but one big special interest, the fossil fuel industry, has shut down one political party. My strong bet is, if you looked at all of the dark money funding the Republican Party in Congress, you would find that it is 80 percent the fossil fuel industry. They have become the political wing of the fossil fuel industry, and they specialize in fake climate denial for that reason, and it is going to cost us. The last decade on climate is going to cost us.

So dark money is not just a plague to the integrity of American democracy; it is a plague that harms our ability to deal with the other problems that are coming our way—wherever there is a big special interest that can play the game of hiding the money and moving it around.

Let me say one last thing.

Dark money? Not really. It is not dark to the candidate who is the beneficiary. When a big dark money donor sets up a shell corporation and gives it a couple of million dollars and then has that shell corporation launder the money through DonorsTrust and then has that money go into a super PAC to be spent for a particular candidate or against his opponent, do you think they don't find a way to let the candidate know what they did and why? The only people who are not in on the joke are the American people, and we have got to put an end to this.

Democracy behind masks isn't democracy at all. Let's get rid of this stuff. The American public will be with us. It will provide health and hygiene to our democracy again, and we will start to see results for the American people in a way that the dark money has prevented.

I thank Senator MERKLEY for leading us in this enterprise. This is a public service. This is why we came here. This

is the democracy that needs defending, and, by God, we are going to defend it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am happy to join in this block of time in which Members are coming forward to talk about the For the People Act.

I thank Senator MERKLEY for being our leader and inspiration in many aspects of this and Chair AMY KLOBUCHAR from the Rules Committee, who will have the honor of bringing this matter before our committee for debate and discussion.

Tomorrow is going to mark 11 weeks since we sat in this Chamber late into the night and debated the certification of the electoral college vote of the November 3 election. It was an experience none of us will ever forget.

Hours before we were told to rush out of this Chamber as quickly as possible because the insurrectionist mob was just a few feet away, we had been told they were going to keep this place safe for us. We were to sit at our chairs and gather our staffs along the walls. You will be safe. You will be just fine. Ten minutes later, they said: Run as fast as you can. It was an experience that none of us ever expected in the U.S. Capitol Building and one we will certainly never forget.

We had been rushed out of the Chamber as this mob attacked the Capitol in an effort to stop us from fulfilling our constitutional duty in recognizing Joe Biden as the President of the United States. If that were in a novel 20 years ago, I would have said: It is preposterous. It will never happen in America.

But I saw it. I lived it. Many of us did.

This mob had been fueled by weeks of lies, disinformation, and baseless allegations of fraudulent votes and a stolen election.

I couldn't get over that, yesterday, a lawyer named Sidney Powell, who was the big defender of the big lie, said: Do you mean people actually believed me? How could they possibly believe me?

Well, that is how far it has come. The preposterous statements being made by the pro-Trump forces about stealing the election now are so laughable that people are trying to escape legal liability by saying: Surely, you didn't take that seriously.

Well, an awful lot of people did across America, and many of them marched on this Capitol.

Despite this horrific attack on the Capitol and our democracy, some of our colleagues, to amplify these wild claims, they continue to object to the electoral vote count and claim that Congress needed to do more to assure voters that the 2020 election was legitimate.

A few of those colleagues even proposed a sham Commission to audit the election. They were relying on an 1876 precedent that was responsible for the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the Jim Crow era, a precedent

that established rank discrimination against African Americans for decades and invited brutal voter suppression efforts that sadly, amazingly, we are still fighting today.

Here is the reality: If those colleagues were serious about protecting democracy, they would be standing on the floor with us right now. They would have stayed in their seats when the electoral college vote was certified. They wouldn't have spent weeks challenging and questioning the legitimate results of an election that their chosen candidate actually lost, and they would be on the floor with us, as I said, in support of the For the People Act.

Anyone who truly believes that we need to strengthen the integrity of our elections and democratic process should be cosponsoring this bill.

The For the People Act ensures that all eligible Americans can cast a ballot without burdensome barriers that suppress the vote.

In 1890, there was established something called the Mississippi Plan. The Mississippi Plan was State legislation carefully crafted to make certain that African Americans didn't have the right to vote.

Other States looked at it carefully and said: This is the answer. Literacy tests, poll taxes, every obstacle they could dream of became part of the Mississippi Plan, with the express purpose of disenfranchising African Americans recently emancipated.

That plan, unfortunately, lived out its days for decades and performed as expected, suppressing the vote. Again, we face this kind of challenge.

The bill that we are talking about here invests in election infrastructure and provides State and local officials with the resources they need for safe and secure elections.

The bill reforms a broken campaign finance system that elevates the voices of wealthy donors today and special interests, and it strengthens and enhances ethics and transparency requirements.

I am proud to be here today because this bill also includes the Fair Elections Now Act. I have introduced this every year since 2007. And occasionally, just occasionally, I would get a Republican cosponsor.

The idea behind it is simple: public financing of campaigns, a voluntary, small-donor public financing system for Senate candidates who agree to raise small-dollar contributions, not big money.

The fair elections public financing system would elevate the views and interests of a diverse spectrum of Americans rather than just the wealthy.

I am lucky to have a House sponsor, JOHN SARBANES. His father and I served in the Senate together, and he really has done a remarkable job promoting the bill in the House.

We would pay for these campaigns, public financing, without spending a dime of taxpayers' dollars. It would be financed with assessments on wealthy bad actors and industry lawbreakers.

Voluntary, small-donor public financing of congressional campaigns would mean more candidates with more ideas and a Congress that works for more than just the top 1 percent in America.

I thank Senator MERKLEY for, once again, including this act in the bill, and, again, I thank Congressman SARBANES for his leadership in the House.

The Fair Elections Now Act is just one of the many critical reforms in this bill that will empower voters and combat corruption.

After months of the former President and his allies undermining faith in our electoral system with their unjustified claims, we must take immediate, concrete steps to repair our battered democracy.

I urge all my colleagues to join in this mission and support the For the People Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues who have come to the floor to speak so powerfully to the essential task of defending the ballot box, of stripping dark money out of our elections, of honoring the vision of equal representation by ending the practice of gerrymandering across this country.

Senator KLOBUCHAR, who chairs the Rules Committee and who will host and direct the committee hearing, the first ever for S. 1, For the People Act, made a powerful representation of how vote-by-mail gives every citizen a full opportunity to participate in elections without the manipulations that can occur on election day, when different people who do not want you to have access to a ballot can put all kinds of hurdles and obstacles in your way.

Senator VAN HOLLEN, who authored the DISCLOSE Act in the House, reminded us of John Lewis and his fellow protestors being beaten bloody on the Edmund Pettus Bridge to secure the right to vote, as so many other Americans have fought for the right to vote since our founding.

Senator PADILLA, who implemented so many reforms in California as Secretary of State, gave us a sense that this can be done anywhere in the country in time for next year's elections.

Senator WHITEHOUSE, who has championed the DISCLOSE Act in the Senate, noted that there is a scheme of 501(c)(3) corporations and donor advice trusts and phony-balance shell corporations, as he put it, all working to corrupt our campaigns and that the amount of money that has been used to secure power to the powerful by manipulating the elections now exceeds \$1 billion.

And Senator DURBIN, who has championed year after year after year the Fair Elections Now Act, presenting a powerful remedy for the role of Big Money donations in our campaigns through public financing—public financing, not with government funds

but with funds that come from corporate malfeasance.

So I appreciate so much these col-leagues who have been all involved in so many different ways in this battle to save our Republic.

There is always a powerful force seeking to manipulate the election process to their favor, and it is one of many tools that that powerful group brings to bear. There are the dozens of lawyers who work night and day, being paid hundreds of dollars an hour, to secure power for the powerful. There are the public media campaigns that take tens of millions of dollars to frame issues to try to persuade Americans of their particular viewpoint or to drive a wedge between different groups of Americans. There is that dark money. There are those efforts in State legislatures to block the vote.

I want to just close by reminding us all that the Constitution clearly states that elections for Senators and House Members, this body—Congress—has the ability to pass laws to make sure those elections are fair across this country because every American of any State has a clear stake in the legitimacy of the elections in other States because it is the collective voice here that makes decisions. So this is not only a responsibility provided to us, it is a responsibility that we must fulfill to defend the ballot box, to end gerrymandering violating equal representation, and clear that dark money, polluting and corrupting our campaigns, out of the system forevermore.

Let's get this essential bill, this essential defense of the pulsating heart of our democracy, the ballot box—let's get this bill passed.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am an unabashed optimist. I am a glass-half-full not a glass-half-empty kind of guy, and I tell my staff that I am like the little boy who goes down on Christmas morning and looks under the Christmas tree and finds a pile of manure and wonders where my pony is. That is how much of an optimist I am.

So I am optimistic about our progress made in the war against COVID-19 after this long year that we have all endured. So far, a quarter of Americans over the age of 18 have received at least one dose of the vaccine. More than two-thirds of people over 65 have gotten their first shot. In my State, they have recently said everybody 50 and up can get a shot. Now, very soon, any adult person over the age of 16 will be eligible to get the vaccine. That translates into good news

across the board. New cases, deaths, and hospitalizations are all declining. Over the last week, the 7-day positivity rate in Texas dropped to the lowest point since last May.

While we continue to follow the public health guidelines to slow the spread of the virus, it is clear we are moving closer and closer to an eventual end of this pandemic, and there are a million reasons to be optimistic.

Despite the narrative pushed by some, all of this hope isn't the result of just the last couple of months, and it certainly is not the product of the partisan bill that was passed just 2 weeks ago. These efforts have been underway for more than a year now, and we owe a great deal of credit to Operation Warp Speed, the initiative set up by the Trump administration to accelerate the development of vaccines, treatments, and therapeutics.

Last summer, when President Trump speculated that we would have an effective vaccine by the end of the year, he received some serious blowback. One media outlet published a fact check saying it would require nothing short of a "medical miracle." Well, thanks to the leadership of the previous administration, thanks to the great scientists, pharmaceutical companies, and others, that so-called miracle has come true not just once but twice. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines received emergency authorization last year, and Johnson & Johnson's vaccine was authorized last month.

Rather than setting ambitious goals to bring an end to the pandemic, the Biden administration has embraced a different approach. An Associated Press headline in January evaluated the situation pretty well when it said that Biden's early approach is to "underpromise" and "overdeliver."

Well, in December, President-Elect Biden announced his administration's vaccine goal as 100 million shots in the first hundred days. That announcement came about a week before the first doses of the vaccine were distributed, before we had a real-world test of the processes that had been in the planning stages for months. But it quickly became obvious that we were on a pace to meet that goal before President Biden even took the oath of office on January 20. The week of the inauguration, we averaged 1 million shots a day. On January 20, 1.5 million Americans received the vaccine. One physician and public health expert described the President's goal as a "disappointingly low bar." To no one's surprise, the administration met that goal well ahead of the deadline.

Last week, the President claimed a victory for hitting 100 million vaccines in 58 days. Well, so did he follow up with a new goal, a truly ambitious one that would get us shots in arms even faster? Did he set up a new benchmark to encourage States to make their vaccination efforts more efficient and effective? Well, not yet. Maybe he will. Maybe he will announce a new goal

this week. For the sake of our country, I hope he sets the bar high.

Given the fact that we are now vaccinating about 2.5 million Americans per day—a staggering number, really—it is time for the administration to take a truly bold step. The goal here isn't to set a target you are almost certain to meet. After all, you didn't see the previous administration set a target of a successful vaccine by the summer of 2021, which is what many experts believed at the time.

Unfortunately, the underpromise, overdeliver strategy doesn't end with vaccinations. Just look at the President's latest comments about small outdoor gatherings. In the same speech where he tried to take a victory lap for the "disappointingly low bar" set for vaccinations, he made a rather confusing promise to the American people.

He said:

If we keep our guard up, stick together, and stick with the science, we can look forward to a Fourth of July that feels a little bit more normal with small groups able to gather for cookouts in backyards.

Well, that was a little bit of a head-scratcher, when President Biden said that he anticipated that everybody who wanted the vaccine could get it by May, and now he is talking about having outdoor gatherings on the Fourth of July.

I can tell you, these small outdoor gatherings have been a part of many Texans' routines for almost all year now. Families and friends have spent time in driveways, backyards, open-air spaces, parks. They follow the public health guidelines to keep themselves and their loved ones safe while managing some sense of normalcy.

The Centers for Disease Control has said it is safe for fully vaccinated individuals to gather not just outdoors but indoors as well. But based on the President's remarks last week, he is trying to frame these gatherings as a reward if things go well over the next few months. If you do everything right, then you might be able to hang out with your family in the backyard in 3 months. Well, the administration's own Centers for Disease Control has already told us that these gatherings are safe. Your current public health guidelines can't also double as a goal for 3½ months from now.

Then there is another big inconsistency between what the experts are telling us and what the administration is doing, and that has to do with reopening schools. Some children have now hit the anniversary mark of virtual learning. Studies have shown consistently that this is having a huge negative impact on America's kids academically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.

We need our schools to reopen, and, of course, we need that to happen safely, which they can. Back in December, then President-Elect Biden seemed to share that goal. He promised to safely reopen the majority of schools within his first hundred days in the White